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GEOGRAPHIC SUPPORT STUDY

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AFGHANISTAN

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May 1964

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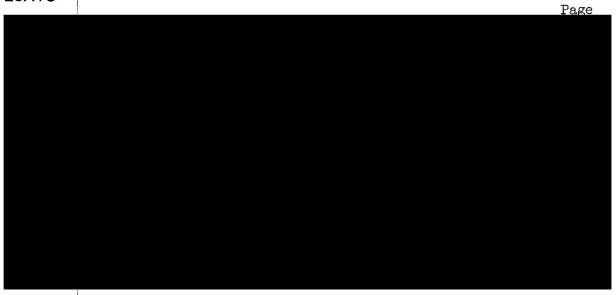
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CONTENTS

																												Page
I.	Map	s and	i C	har	ts		•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•	1
	A., B.	Reco Lim:	omm ita	endo t i o:	ed ns	Ma of	aps	8 8 4v8	and ail	l (Lat	Che ole	rt e N	s Iar	• ວຣ	• ar	• nd	Cr	• nar	· ts	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	1
II.	Ter	rain	•				•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•:	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•.	3
	A. B. C. D.	Gend High Low Dra	hla lan	nds .ds	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•:	•	•	•	3 3 6 7
III.	Veg	et a t	ion		•				•		•	•	•				•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•		9
	A. B.	Typ Alt	es itu	of din	Ve al	get Zo	tat one	tio es	on •	•	•-	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	9 10
IV.	Cli	mate	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•-	•	•	•	•-	•	13
	A. B. C. D.	Gen Tem Pre Win	per cip	atu ita	re ti	• on	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	13 13 13 14
٧.	Tra	nspo	rte	tio	n	•	•	•	•	•		•-	•		•	•	•		•		•	•	•		•	•	•	15
VI.	Pec	ple	•		•		•	•			•	•	•	٠	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•-	•	•	•*	•	17
	A. B.			ıl . Gr																								17 19
		1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9.	Ta Ha Uz Ch Tu Nu Ki Ba	isht ijik izar ibek iaha irko irko irko indi	a r me niz	Ain	mal	k.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	19 21 22 22 23 23 23 23

- iii -

25X1C



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(under separate cover)

Maps and Photographs

Map showing Physical Regions Plate I

Plate II Map showing Ethnic Groups

Plate III Map showing Vegetation

Location 1 - Foothills near Herat (34°20'N-62°12'E)

Plate IV

Location 2 - Part of stony desert near Herat

Location 3 - Old road between Herat and Kushka, USSR (35°16'N-62°08'E)

Location 4 - Bed of Kushk River near Kushk, Afghanistan (34053'N-62030'E)

Location 5 - Old man of the Hazaras

Plate V

Location 6 - Native dwelling near Panjao (34°22'N-67°01'E)

Location 7 - Tajik encampment near Daulet Yar (34°32'N-65°47'E)

Location 8 - Band-i-Amir Valley (approximately 35013'N-66014'E)

Location 9 - Scene near village of Chahil Dukhtaran (35045'N-65011'E)

- iv -

```
Plate VI
 Location 10 - Caves just west of Belchirag (35048'N-65013'E)
  Location 11 - Road between Andkhui (36056'N-65008'E) and Maimana
                  (35°55'N-64°46'E), March 1959
  Location 12 - Eastern outskirts of Tashkurghan (36042'N-67041'E)
  Location 13 - Level grassy plain near Hazrat Imam (37014'N-68046'E)
Plate VII
  Location 14 - Frontier post near Shah Rawan (37°06'N-69°17'E)
 Location 15 - Market section of Khanabad (36042'N-69005'E)
 Location 16 - Bridge over Kokcha River near Faizabad (37006'N-70034'E)
 Location 17 - Wakhan Corridor just east of Sarhad-i-Wakhan (36059'N-73027'E)
Plate VIII
  Location 18 - Wursach Pass (approximately 36°20'N-70°10'E)
  Location 19 - Nuri tribesmen near Kivisht (35°16'N-70°13'E)
  Location 20 - Khyber Pass (34007'N-71010'E)
  Location 21 - Tajik villagers at Tala Barfaq (35°25'N-68°14'E)
Plate IX
  Location 22 - Road from Bulola (34°53'N-68°05'E) to Bamian (34°50'N-67°50'E)
  Location 23 - Road near Shibar Pass (34054'N-68014'E, elevation 9,800 feet)
  Location 24 - Rugged mountains of the Hindu Kush
  Location 25 - Kabul (34031'N-69012'E), the capital of Afghanistan
Plate X
  Location 26 - Pushtuns, near Ghazni (33033'N-68026'E)
  Location 27 - Plain with bunchgrass near Mukur (32052'N-67047'E)
  Location 28 - Kandahar - Spin Baldak highway near Kandahar (31035'N-65045'E)
  Location 29 - Boghra diversion dam near Girisk (31048'N-64034'E)
Plate XI
  Location 30 - Irrigated fields in Arghandab Valley (approximately
                  31029'N-64020'E)
  Location 31 - Registan Desert in southwestern Afghanistan
  Location 32 - The Dasht-i-Margo or Desert of Death (30045'N-63010'E)
  Location 33 - Foothills of high lands in western Afghanistan
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- v -

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AFGHANISTAN



- vii -

25X1C AFGHANISTAN

I. Maps and Charts

A. Recommended Maps and Charts

Two basic series of aeronautical charts are available for Afghan-istan. The USAF Jet Navigation Charts (JN) at 1:2,000,000, which are useful for planning routes and for navigation, and the general purpose World Aeronautical Charts (WAC) at 1:1,000,000 cover the area. All charts of the area should be used with caution.

Small-scale topographic coverage for all of Afghanistan is available in seven sheets of the International Map of the World (IMW) series at 1:1,000,000, which is distributed by the Army Map Service as AMS 1301. Larger scale topographic coverage is available for 80 percent of the country in 91 sheets of the Quarter Inch series (1:253,440), which is distributed as AMS N571, U501, and U511. The entire Afghanistan - USSR border is covered by 10 sheets of the Army Map Service series N502 at 1:250,000. Parts of the Afghanistan - Pakistan border east of Kandahar are covered by five sheets of the AMS U502 series at 1:250,000, the only other coverage available at this scale.

B. Limitations of Available Maps and Charts

The major limitations of available sheets are as follows:

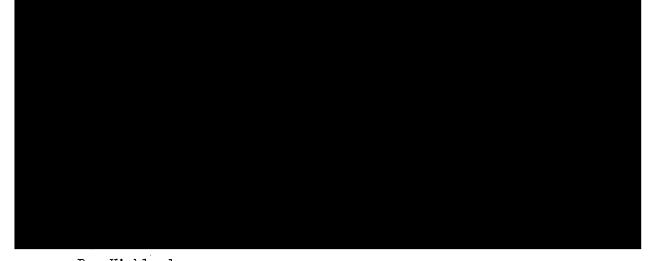
 For much of the area, survey data on which to base detailed mapping are lacking.

- 2. Most elevations are approximations. Spot heights are unreliable.
- 3. Cultural detail is inaccurate and incomplete.
- 4. Grid and topographic detail do not match across some sheet lines.
- 5. Place names are not consistent from one series to another.

II. Terrain

A. General

Afghanistan is a landlocked country with an area of slightly more than 250,000 square miles (650,000 sq km) -- about the size of Texas (see map, Plate I). International boundaries are shared with Iran, the USSR, China, and Pakistan. The terrain of northeastern and central Afghanistan is characterized by high rugged mountains, hills, narrow valleys, and gorges. In north-central Afghanistan a level to rolling plain borders the USSR for more than 150 miles (240 km). Although relatively flat, a large area of the southwest is rough, dry, and barren.



B. Highlands

The rugged Hindu Kush mountain ranges are the most prominent features of the highland area of central and northeastern Afghanistan (see Plate IX, Location 24). Elevations range from 5,000 to 15,000 feet (1,500 to 4,500 m) above sea level, but some elevations in the northeast are as high as 20,000 feet (6,100 m). Crests are generally sharp and

- 3 -

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jagged in the east but are rounded or flat-topped and lower in the west (see Plate IV, Location 3). The mountain slopes in the northeast are typically steep and rocky, and the passes are 12,000 feet (3,650 m) or more above sea level. The Wakhan Corridor, an eastward-jutting panhandle that is approximately 180 miles (290 km) long by 10 to 35 miles (16 to 56 km) wide, is flanked by the highest and most forbidding mountain ranges in the country (see Plate VII, Location 17).

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The Baroghil Pass (36°54'N-73°21'E), the lowest pass leading south into Pakistan, is 12,460 feet (3,700 m) above sea level and is closed by deep snow from November to April.

The sparsely populated region of Badakshan, in the mountainous area west of the Wakhan Corridor, is forbidding. Only narrow pack trails cross the ranges. Movement is channeled chiefly along the valleys, which in a few places widen to form isolated pockets of grazing land. Most of the nomads found in the area in the summer return to the Kabul River Valley for the winter. Travelers moving from this area southward toward Kabul cross the Anjuman Pass (13,860 feet or 4,200 meters) and descend along the Panjshir Valley.

Nuristan, another isolated but slightly less rugged region, lies south of Badakshan and east of the Anjuman Pass. The narrow valleys of this region are separated by spurs of the Hindu Kush mountains that rise to more than 15,000 feet (4,600 m).

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- 4 -

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In the southeastern Afghan Highlands, ranges of narrow mountains and hills are separated by broad valleys. Most of the ranges trend northeast to southwest, with elevations descending from 12,000 feet (3,700 m) in the north to 5,000 feet (1,500 m) in the south. Valley floors are generally level to rolling, interrupted by hills, low sand dunes, gravelly knolls, and steep-sided gullies.

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The Koh-i-Baba Range, in the central part of the country, continues westward from the Hindu Kush. The Koh-i-Baba is a rugged, barren region that is the source of important rivers such as the Hari Rud, Kabul, and Melmand. Snow prevents vehicles -- and at times, animals -- from using the passes in the winter. West of the Koh-i-Baba the Paropamisus Range gradually descends from an elevation of 12,000 feet (3,700 m) above sea level in the east to about 5,000 feet (1,500 m) in the west (see Plate III, Location 1). To the north the bare and rounded summits of the Band-i-Turkistan Mountains (see Plate V, Location 9) descend to the foothills that border the Northern Plain.

South-central Afghanistan is a maze of ridges and valleys known as the Hazarajat.

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West and southwest of the Hazarajat, mountain spurs fan out and lose much of their jagged nature. The intervening

- · 5 -

valleys are narrow gorges that gradually widen out into the southwestern desert basins (see Plate XI, Location 33).

C. Lowlands

In Afghanistan the two distinct lowland regions, the Northern Plain and the Southwest Desert Basin, contrast markedly with the Afghan Highlands.

The Northern Plain, which lies between the USSR and the Afghan Highlands, is a predominantly level to rolling region about 280 miles (450 km) long and 10 to 70 miles (16 to 110 km) wide. The center of this plain, a sandy region about 25 miles (40 km) wide, is extremely dry and barren. There are some hills in the southwest and hills and low mountains in the east.

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The Southwest Desert Basin is an area of level to rolling plains, low hills, and sand dunes. The western part of the region is a gravelly and stony desert (see Plate IV, Location 2), with some low hills in the north. The 2-mile-wide Helmand River Valley extends generally east-west across the southern part of the region (see Plate X, Location 29). Sand ridges and shifting sand dunes characterize the desert in the southeastern part of the region. Most of the dunes are 50 to 100 feet (15 to 30 m) high, but some in the east may reach 500 feet (150 m). The Seistan Basin, which straddles the Afghanistan - Iran border is an area of rocky and sandy desert into which the Helmand River drains. Intermittent lakes, marshes,

- 6 -

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and salt flats dot the area.

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D. Drainage

Most streams in the Afghan Highlands flow all year, but many of them are frozen in the winter. Mountain streams customarily flood in late spring because of snowmelt and in many areas cannot be crossed except over precarious bridges (see Plate VII, Location 16). In the desert basins of the southwest, the Helmand River is the major exception to the prevailing pattern of intermittent streams. All the streams of the Northern Plain flow north to the Amu Darya (see Plate VII, Location 14), but none crosses the sandy part of the plain.

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- 7 -

III. Vegetation

A. Types of Vegetation

True forests grow only in small areas of eastern Afghanistan, on the mountain slopes of Nuristan and the Safed Koh, and in the Kunar Valley and the Khost region (33°20'N-70°00'E). These forests consist of oaks and evergreen trees such as pine, fir, spruce, and cedar. Thin clusters of oaks and evergreens also are found along the northern highlands and in the Hindu Kush and Koh-i-Baba. The Paropamisus Range in western Afghanistan has many junipers, and in the foothills of both the Hindu Kush and the Paropamisus Range the pistachio tree grows in isolated clumps. Scrub and scattered trees are found throughout the country, but usually (see map on Plate III).

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Small bushes, mulberry thickets, and scattered poplar and willow trees are found in river valleys that are not cultivated (see Plate V, Location 8). Little vegetation of any kind is found in the southwestern deserts. Both sandy and stony areas are almost completely barren, but a few small thorny shrubs may grow in depressions. Grass also may appear after the rains in the spring. Some marsh grass grows near the Seistan Basin. On the uncultivated sections of a riverbank, tamarisk bushes

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Also sparse brush, which grows from 2 to 6 feet

(60 to 180 cm) high, in the northwestern part of 25X1C

the desert basin and in the hill areas.

Most of the cultivated areas of Afghanistan are found along the rivers where water for irrigation is available (see Plate XI, Location 30).

- 9 -

The chief crops are small grains, fruits, melons, and vegetables. The

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B. Altitudinal Zones

Below 4,500 feet (1,400 m) grasses growing as high as 3 feet (90 cm) predominate in the stony areas of the Northern Plain, and thorny shrubs sparsely cover the drier sandy stretches. Both grasses and shrubs are green from March to mid-July, then wither away, and are brown from mid-July to spring.

The Southwest Desert has widely dispersed areas of small, thorny shrubs, 2 to 4 feet (60 to 120 cm) high, and scattered patches of short spring grasses. There is sparse brush 2 to 6 feet (60 to 180 cm) high in the northwestern part of this region and in the mountain and hill areas. Dense, coarse marsh grass up to 10 feet (30.5 cm) high is found in the Seistan Basin.

From 4,500 to 10,000 feet (1,400 to 3,100 m) dry mountain scrub mixture consisting of scattered bushes, grasses, and some flowering plants predominates, but the only woodlands in Afghanistan also grow in this zone. The forests in the east -- largely evergreen trees such as pine, fir, spruce, and cedar interspersed with sparse to dense undergrowth -- are found at elevations between 8,000 and 10,000 feet (2,450 and 3,100 m). From 6,000 to 8,000 feet (1,800 to 2,450 m) patches of oak with well-developed undergrowth are mixed with some walnut, alder, ash, and juniper.

- 10 -

From 10,000 to 13,000 feet (3,100 to 4,000 m) mountain meadows with short grasses and flowering plants are common. A type of mountain scrub that consists of generally thorny and widely spaced shrubs from 2 to 6 feet (60 to 180 cm) high grows below 12,000 feet (3,700 m). From March to July shrubs in this zone are green and leafy, and the ground between them is covered by grass and herbs. After July they have little foliage, and the ground between the bushes is nearly bare.

Above 13,000 feet (4,000 m) the Afghan Highlands are mainly bare rock or, at the highest elevations, glaciers. Scattered meadows of sparse grass and flowering plants occur in the eastern mountains south of the Kabul River Valley.

- 11 -

IV. Climate

A. General

Summers in Afghanistan are characteristically hot and dry; winters are cold, with snow in the mountains and northern lowlands. An outstanding feature of the climate is the great contrast in temperature between day and night and between highland and lowland.

B. Temperature

Winter temperatures in the lowlands range from 40° to 60°F (4° to 16°C) in the afternoon and drop to 25° to 35°F (-4° to 2°C) at night. Summer temperatures in the lowlands reach 95° to 105°F (35° to 41°C) in the afternoon and are seldom less than 65° to 75°F (18° to 24°C) at night.

Temperatures in the highlands are considerably cooler than those at lower elevations. Maximum temperatures in the winter may be near freezing in the afternoon and drop to O°F (-18°C) at night. In the northeast mountains, the highest terrain in the country, temperatures as low as -45°F (-43°C) have been recorded in the winter. Summer temperatures reach highs of 85° to 95°F (29 to 35°C) in the afternoon but may be as low as 50°F (10°C) at night.

C. Precipitation

Most precipitation occurs in the winter and spring. Average annual precipitation in the Northern Plain is less than 8 inches (20 cm) and is usually a mixture of snow, sleet, and rain. The snow seldom exceeds 1 foot (30 cm) in depth. In April and May the streams are swollen because of the melting snows and thundershowers.

- 13 -

In the desert, short heavy rains produce flash floods that can rapidly fill a dry wadi and sweep away people or vehicles. Annual precipitation averages less than 6 inches (15 cm) and water seldom remains long on the surface. The heaviest downpour customarily impedes travel for only a few hours.

Precipitation in the highlands is generally between 10 and 15 inches (25 to 38 cm) a year. Strong winds predominate in the winter, and deep snow blocks most of the passes that are 7,000 to 8,000 feet (2,100 to 2,450 m) above sea level. Sudden storms are common.

D. Winds

Strong winds occur throughout Afghanistan and may become a severe hardship both in summer and winter. In summer the "wind of 120 days," a strong dust-laden wind that reaches velocities of 45 to 55 miles (72 to 88 km) per hour, blows across western Afghanistan. Over wide areas, dust devils 10 to 12 feet (3 to 4 m) in diameter rise as high as 1,000 feet (300 m) above the surface. Severe turbulance may be encountered over the plains and deserts and over mountain slopes during the summer. Piercing winter winds that sweep across the plains from the north and funnel through the mountain valleys choke the passes with drifted snow

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- 14 -

V. Transportation

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Afghanistan depends primarily on trucks for transporting cargo and for much of the passenger movement. The camel caravan is still widely used. Road and village signs are very rare and villages and physical features are often known by more than one name. Local usage is sometimes the only true test of spelling or pronunciation of a local name.

Good roads are rare. The USSR is constructing a road that is designed for heavy trucks from the Soviet border through Herat to Kandahar. Soviet engineers also built a 70-mile (113 km) shortcut on the main route between the Soviet border and Kabul over the Salang Pass. Aid from the United States has been applied largely to the road from Kabul to Kandahar and on to Spin Baldak (see Plate X, Location 28) and to the road from Kabul through the Kandahar Pass, both of which lead to Pakistan (see Plate VIII, Location 20). The road to the Iranian border and the railhead at Meshed is largely unimproved but is used by limited numbers of through trucks. Other roads are little more than unimproved tracks, and many areas are accessible only by pack trail. Guides are often required to select the right trail among several that appear to lead in the general direction of intended movement.

- 15 **-**

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Routes through the mountains are often impassable because of drifted snow for extended periods during the winter (see Plate VIII, Location 18). In the spring, movement is impeded by high water in the streams and washouts on the roads and trails. Also in the mountains, vehicles are restricted to tracks that have received some preparation (see Plate IX, Location 23), and in many areas all movement is on foot or on horses, donkeys, and yaks. On the plains, off-track vehicular movement is possible in many places and may be better than on the track itself.

The best months for travel in the mountains are late May through early November, when snowmelt has subsided and before new snow falls.

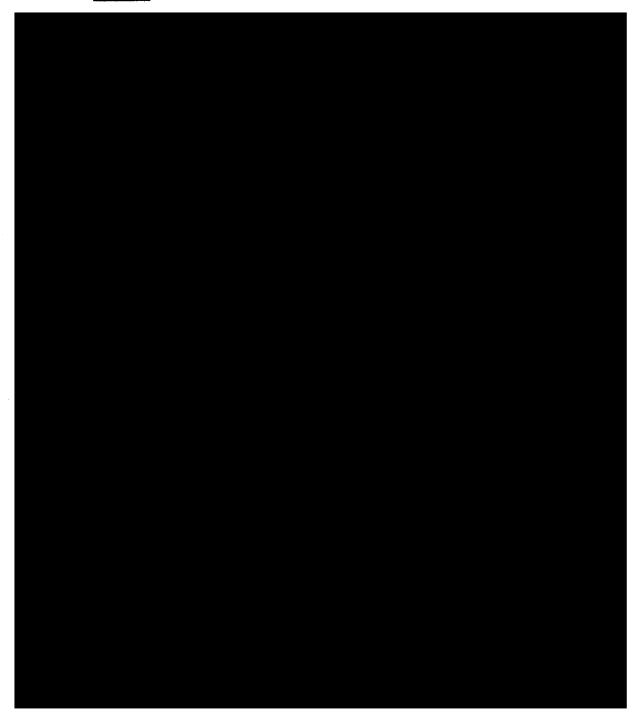
In the southwest the cooler winter months offer the best conditions for movement of any kind.

- 16 -

VI. People

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A. General



- 17 -

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individuals place their own welfare and that of their tribe or village above the interests of the central government. The general population traditionally ignores the law of the land, especially if personal gain is at stake. They see little sense in laws that have been made "down in the city," by city people, and for the benefit of the government -- laws that work real or imagined hardships on the country man.

The population of Afghanistan, about 12 million people, is split into a number of ethnic and tribal groupings. Although there has been some blending of the population, these individual groups have retained many of their traditions. The great majority of the people are still rural villagers or nomads who have little concept of national unity. To these people, loyalty to the village or the tribe comes before support of a government in Kabul (see Plate IX, Location 25). A relatively few politically conscious persons have been responsible for a shaky national unity under the leadership of Pushtuns -- the largest ethnic group in the country.

Most Afghans are nominal Muslims and belong largely to the Sunni sect. The mosque, or village church, and the mullah, who corresponds to the village priest, are important institutions. On Friday, special services are held in the mosque and are attended largely by men, but on any other day numerous people may be seen meditating, reading, or quietly talking in the mosque. Westerners are permitted to enter the mosque, but visits should not interfere with services or prayers. Shoes are never worn in a mosque, but hats are permitted.

- 18 -

The religious custom of the Muslims that is observed most frequently is the call to prayer issued by the muezzin five times each day from the minaret of the local mosque. Observance of the month of Ramadan, officially a Muslim calendar month of fasting, is a widely respected religious custom, during which time no Muslim is permitted food or drink between sunrise and sunset, and activity during daylight hours is severely restricted. (On the Western calendar Ramadan begins 11 days earlier each year: in 1965, on 5 January and 25 December; in 1966, on 14 December; and in 1967, on 3 December.)

Truly religious persons shun alcohol and tobacco at all times. For many others, abstention is a matter of economic necessity. Islam permits a man to have four wives, but few men can afford more than one. For many people, convenience exerts a stronger pull than religious duty, but all institutions of the church should be treated with respect. Real or imagined criticism of Islam may occasion a violent reaction.

The Uzbeks, the Tajiks, and the Turkomen of Afghanistan are linked with kindred groups in the USSR, which has exploited these ethnic and cultural ties. The influx of Soviet technicians since 1954 has provided 25X1C a potential source of Soviet influence throughout Afghanistan.

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B. Ethnic Groups

1. Pushtun

The Pushtuns (often called Pakhtuns or Pathans) number approximately 5 million persons and are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

- 19 -

They are in a wide west-to-east arc across western and southern Afghanistan from the vicinity of Herat near the Iranian border to the Kabul
River near the Khyber Pass. The two major Pushtun tribes are the Durani,
who live in the foothills of the southwest, and the Ghilzai, who live in
the foothills and highlands of the southeast (see Plates I and II).

These people speak a language called Pushtu that resembles Persian (Farst). The traditional dress for men is a collarless white shirt reaching to the heels, baggy trousers, a vest or a long coat, and a turban (see Plate X, Location 6). Shoes or sandals are a mark of some means; the poorer person wraps his feet in cloth. The women in the city wear a burka, a cloth that covers the body from head to foot, but in the country-side large shawls that can be used for veils are common. Women value jewelry and trinkets. Because possessions are few and banking is unknown, the gold in jewelry and trinkets often represents the worldly wealth of the family.

Many nomadic Pushtun tribesmen traditionally wintered in the valleys of the Swat and Indus Rivers in Pakistan and in the summer grazed their herds in the mountain valleys of Afghanistan. Migration back and forth

- 20 -

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across the border was stopped in 1961. Some of the Pushtuns who were in the Afghan valleys at the end of the summer and could not return to Pakistan were moved by the Afghan Government to grazing lands in the southwest because winters in the mountains are so harsh. Some Pushtuns stayed in the mountains of Afghanistan; many others were forced to remain in Pakistan. The international boundary is a barrier that divides these people of similar culture and outlook. Although herds cannot be driven across the border, individuals or small groups still make their way back and forth.

2. Tajik

Approximately 2.5 million Tajiks are concentrated in the northeast, from Kabul to the western half of the Wakhan Corridor; they are also found in small numbers throughout the country (see Plate V, Location 7). Tajik dress is similar to that of the Pushtuns (see Plate VIII, Location 21) but includes leather boots and wool stockings. Many women wear shoes with turned-up toes, have their trousers trimmed with lace, paint their bodies, and wear earrings and mascara. They speak Farsi and call themselves Farsiwan or Parziwan.

3. Hazara

The Hazaras are a Mongoloid group found in the central mountains in an area called the Hazarajat (see Plate IV, Locations 5 and 6). They number between 0.5 million and 0.75 million and speak Farsi mixed with words from Turkic dialects as well as some Mongolian words. Hazaras wear loose fitting clothing, baggy trousers, a second-hand Western-style coat if available or a sheepskin coat in winter.

- 21 -

The Hazaras move with the seasons through the river valleys of their area. Unlike most Afghans, they are Shia Muslims and are constantly at odds with their neighbors, the Sunni Muslim Pushtuns.

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4. Uzbek

The Uzbeks, numbering 800,000 to a million persons, are located in the northern provinces adjacent to the USSR. The Uzbeks (also spelled Uzbegs) speak Uzbeki and Farsi. The nomadic Uzbek wears a sheepskin cap, whereas the sedentary people customarily wear turbans (see Plate VII, Location 15).

5. Chahar Aimak

The nomadic Chahar Aimak people number about 800,000 and are found in the western part of the highlands. Their domed huts distinguish them from the Hazaras to the immediate east. Their clothing is similar to that of the other groups, and many speak a language close to Farsi.

6. Turkomen

Located in the western part of the Northern Lowlands, the Turkomen number about 100,000. They are primarily herdsmen and wear tall, sheepskin hats over felt caps that cover their shaven heads. They speak a Turkic language.

- 22 -

7. Nuri

The Nuri -- a people estimated to number 100,000 to 300,000 -- inhabit the mountainous region north of the Kabul River in eastern Afghanistan and speak an Indic language (see Plate VIII, Location 19). They have only recently been converted to Islam. Government security elements ring the Nuri tribal area but are not effective within it.

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8. Kirghiz

Numbering only about 2,000, the Kirghiz are located in the extreme northeast in the Wakhan Corridor leading to China. They want nothing to do with the central government

25X1C

25X1C

9. Baluchi

The Baluchi are found in the lower Helmand Valley and number about 30,000. The highly mobile Baluchi maintain contact with smuggling operations into both Iran and Pakistan

25X1C

25X1C

10. Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews

Numbering only about 30,000, the Hindus, the Sikhs, and the Jews are found in scattered colonies in the major cities. Usually they are merchants, shopkeepers, or money-lenders. Jews live mostly in the north, whereas the Hindus and Sikhs live in the south. They all tend to isolate themselves from other ethnic groups.

- 23 -

VII. Food and Water

A. Adequacy of Supply

Food in Afghanistan is a carefully controlled commodity. Providing food for his family is a lifetime effort for many an Afghan peasant. He must maintain a watchful eye over both crops and animals at all

25X1C



B. Plant Food

Nuts and fruits grow wild in small areas of the lower and middle mountain slopes. Grapes, mulberries, apricots, and walnuts are commonly cultivated. Fruits and vegetables are generally found in compounds protected by mud wall enclosures; grains are protected during the harvest

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Dried fruit, nuts, and

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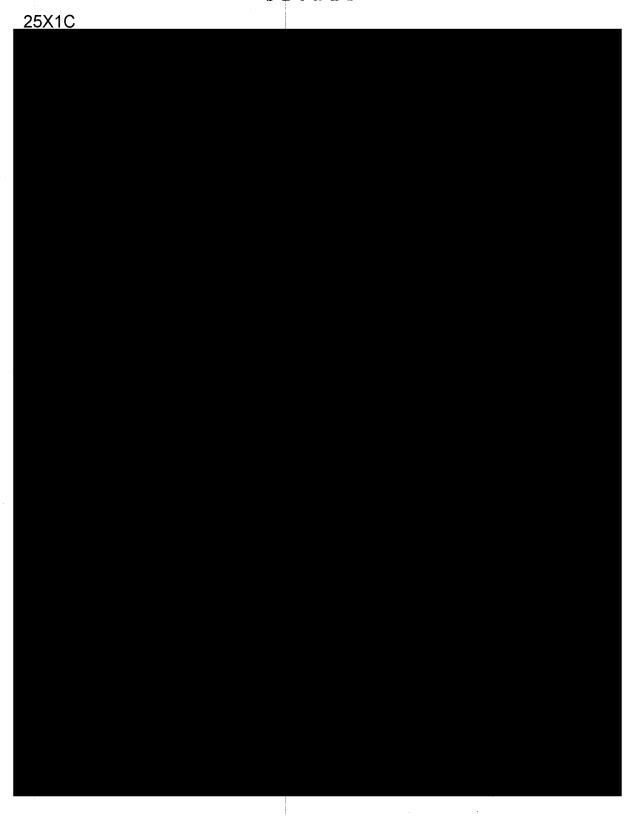
grain are stored in huts for use during the winter.

C. Animals

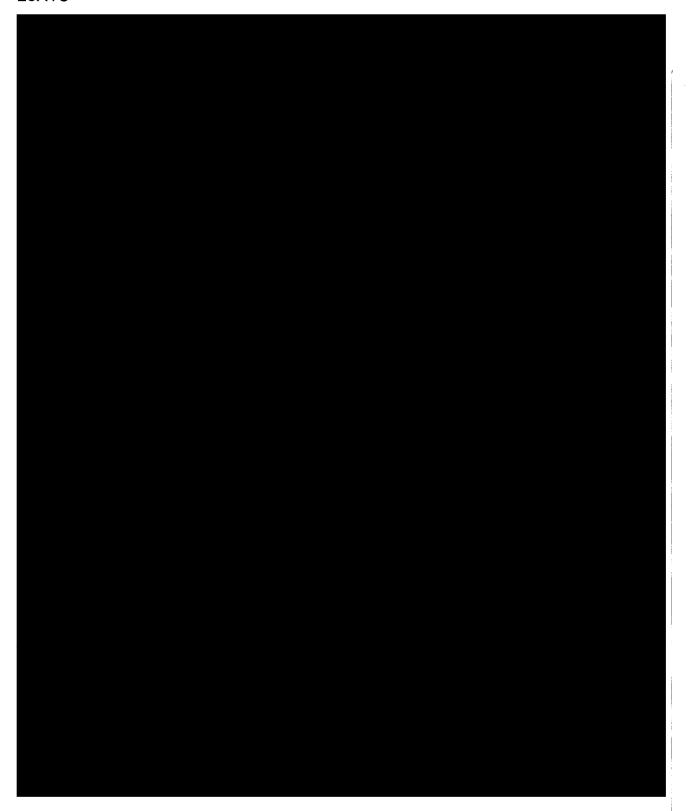
season.

The most common game animals in the area are the ibex, mountain goat, wild sheep, gazelle, wolf, fox, and snow leopard. Waterfowl, partridge, quail, snipe, dove, and pheasant as well as many varieties of

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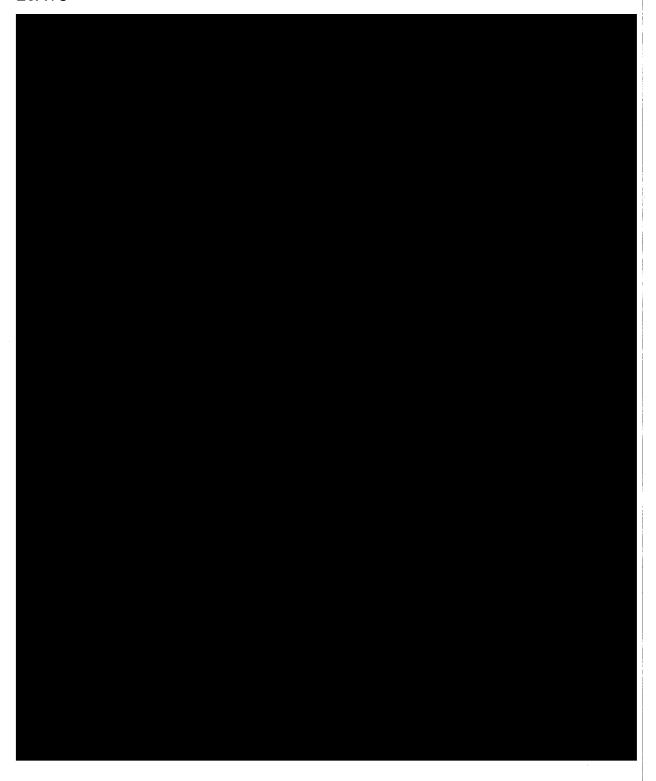
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8 October 1963

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61.2143.	North China		Yugo., Bulgaria, Albania
61.2144.	South China		
61.2145,	North Korea	64.2136,	Kamchatka
61.2146,	Nepal, Bhutan,		Arctic and Far East
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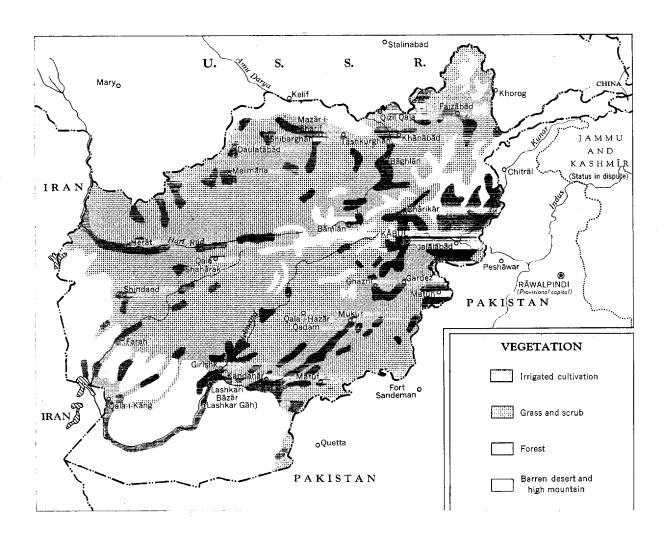
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Location 1 - Foothills near Herat (34°20′N-62°12′E). The settlement along the road is a Soviet construction camp.

